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REVIEW: The Meat and Spirit Plan

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Off the SHELF

The Georgia Library Quarterly reviews books on aspects of life in Georgia and the South, including history, literature, politics, education and genealogy. Materials written by Southern authors or published by regional publishers may also be considered, as well as those on libraries and librarianship.

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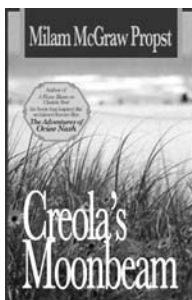
FICTION

Creola's Moonbeam by Milam McGraw Propst (BelleBooks, 2006, ISBN 0-9768760-3-5, \$14.95).

Atlanta author Milam McGraw Propst employs the device of story-within-a-story to paint a portrait of an author at midlife, struggling with writer's block while at the same time looking back at the events of her childhood and her life as a wife and mother.

Having thrown her latest manuscript in the trash, Honey Newberry has retreated to her favorite spot on the Florida coast, vowing to take a vacation from writing. Events conspire against her, however, as the spirit of her beloved nanny Creola seems to be everywhere — even embodied in Beatrice, the free-spirited new friend Honey meets on the beach. Memories come flooding back, and Honey commits them to paper. The present-day narrative moves at a leisurely pace, interspersed with an assortment of domestic vignettes from the past. Honey gradually begins to embrace Beatrice's zest for life and to come to terms with her own life passages, including her relationship to her craft as a writer. The gentle homespun humor and depictions of Southern family life will appeal to readers who enjoy the *Mossy Creek* series and Karin Gillespie's "Bottom Dollar Girl" books. Consider purchasing for public library collections where demand is high for clean, down-home stories about women "of a certain age." »»

— Reviewed by **Sarah Trowbridge**
Fayette County Public Library



The Meat and Spirit Plan by Selah Saterstrom (Coffee House Press, September 2007, ISBN: 1566892015 ISBN: 978-1566892018, \$14.95).

Southern fiction isn't always moonlight and magnolias, as Selah Saterstrom demonstrates in her gut-wrenching novel, *The Meat and Spirit Plan*. Dark humor and sexually explicit paragraphs interspersed with terse surrealistic poetry frame the devastating coming-of-age experiences of a girl from the fictional town of Beau Repose, Mississippi. The young main character, daughter of a drug-addled and mostly absent mother, cannot wait to plunge headfirst into a pathetic cycle of drugs, liquor, sex and more drugs and sex. The dismal underbelly of Beau Repose is the girl's favorite stomping ground as she pursues a path that seems certain to destroy her. She is sent to reform school where she fails to reform, but even so, she earns a scholarship to study, of all things, theology in Scotland. There Saterstrom dangles in front of the reader a glimmer of hope for the anti-heroine of *Meat* in the form of a love affair with an ex-con. Unfortunately the girl discovers that years of self-abuse have ravaged her body. Violently ill, she returns home after receiving more bad news about her mother and is immediately hospitalized. In a near-death state, she looks forward to morphine drips and unusual nocturnal visits from a male nurse who may or may not actually be the janitor. At long last on the mend, she decides, "I don't know what I'm doing. It's liberating and depressing. I could move to Hawaii, but once there, what would I do? I've got to come up with a plan." She



cleans up an old typewriter and sits down to write. Raunchy and relentless, this book is not likely to be a hit with the best-sellers crowd in libraries with small budgets. The right audience for this title from the indie Coffee House Press will be readers who are clamoring for edgy, experimental, no-holds-barred fiction. ►►

—Reviewed by **Teresa Pacheco**
Northeast Georgia Medical Center Library

A Gentle Rain by Deborah Smith
(BelleBooks, Inc., 2007; ISBN 978-0-9768760-7-6, 16.95).

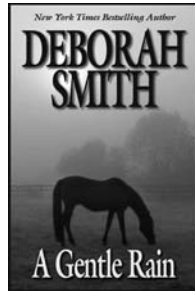
Deborah Smith delivers another heartwarming sophisticated work of romantic fiction in her latest novel, *A Gentle Rain*. The story alternates between the points of view of the two main characters, Kara Whittenbrook and Ben Thocco. Kara, a New England heiress in her early 30s, is struggling with the deaths of her parents. Soon after their deaths, Kara is stunned with the news that she was adopted. On a journey to know her birth parents, Mac and Lily, Kara sets off to the Florida ranch where they now live. When Kara arrives at the ranch, she is surprised to find out that it is a special needs ranch. There she meets the owner of the ranch: single, warm-hearted and self-sacrificing Ben Thocco, who is caring for his own brother, Joey, also mentally challenged. Kara begins to discover love in various ways from all of the characters in this story. The bonds that are created while Kara is at the ranch are a touching account of human kindness at its best. Deborah Smith does a magnificent job of bringing to life both the characters and locations of the novel. Set primarily in northern Florida near Orlando, the places discussed will be familiar to anyone who has ever lived in the South. Deborah Smith's latest novel is very much along the lines of her other books in style and ambiance. *A Gentle Rain* would certainly be a wonderful addition to any wholesome contemporary romance or fiction collection. ►►

—Reviewed by **Carolann Lee Curry**
Mercer University Medical Library

NONFICTION

Civil War Weather in Virginia by Robert K. Krick (The University of Alabama Press, 2007; ISBN 978-0-8173-1577-1, \$39.95).

Inspired by Douglas Southall Freeman's exhortation for Civil War historians to provide a meteorological register of the War Between the



States, Robert K. Krick, himself a prolific Civil War historian (and former chief historian of the battlefield parks of Fredericksburg, Chancellorsville, Wilderness and Spotsylvania), provides a rich reference source on the weather conditions experienced by armies engaged in the tumultuous Northern Virginia theater of war. Union and Confederate armies sought and menaced each others' capitals, Richmond and Washington, D.C., on this ground. Krick draws up weather charts from October 1860 through June 1865. Prior to the establishment of the National Weather Service by a resolution signed by President U. S. Grant in 1870, historians have long relied on soldiers' diaries, memoirs and letters to describe actual battlefield meteorological conditions, the significance of which can hardly be underestimated in 19th century combat. A heavy rainstorm or even hot, dry, dusty weather could be just as potent as field artillery in determining the outcome of a battle. Krick's great reference coup is his transcription of the meticulous meteorological recordings of the Reverend C. K. Mackee of Georgetown, D.C., into monthly charts that include daily temperature and precipitation readings at 7 a.m., 2 p.m. and 9 p.m. The charts, juxtaposed with local newspaper and soldiers' observations (e.g., "it was very hot," "a tremendous storm moved in," "today's been cold and miserable," "muddy roads ... The weather was cold with much snow and rain") make for surprisingly interesting reading. The book is a unique reference source for Civil War buffs and professional historians. ►►

—Reviewed by **James Taylor**
Atlanta-Fulton Public Library

Walker Percy Remembered: A Portrait in the Words of Those Who Knew Him

by David Horace Harwell (University of North Carolina Press, 2006, 978-0-8078-3039-0, \$24.95).

Southern novelist Walker Percy's early years were marked by tragedy. Both his grandfather and father committed suicide, and his mother died in a car accident, which some think may have been a third suicide. It isn't surprising, then, that Percy's protagonists always seemed to be on a search for the meaning of life. He didn't begin his career as a writer, however. At the urging of his uncle, Percy went to medical school, but when he contracted tuberculosis at the age of 26, his medical career was cut short, and he spent the next two years in a sanatorium. During this time of recuperation, Walker began to read the works of philosophers and novelists, which began his lifelong quest to make sense out of the strange, tragic events of his life. Shortly

